



# **HOUSING CRISIS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

Prepared for:

Residents of Santa Barbara County, Santa Barbara County Representatives

Prepared by:

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July 31, 2024

## **Memorandum**

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**To:** Residents of Santa Barbara County, Santa Barbara County Representatives

**From:** Kelly Clark, Max Le, Eyob Teshome, Sam Zeng

**Date:** July 31, 2024

**Re:** Issues Surrounding the Housing Crisis in Isla Vista and Impacts on Students

We are Isla Vista residents and UCSB students who raise awareness about the local housing crisis, which significantly impacts our community and local ecosystem. The high rent and utility prices have been increasingly burdensome on students, forcing many to cram into units, resulting in inadequate garbage disposal and environmental damage. This overcrowding poses health risks and lowers the quality of life.

Safety is also compromised due to limited housing availability and poor-quality units, further marginalizing disabled students. Erosion of Isla Vista cliffs exacerbates these dangers, leading to tragic accidents. Additionally, over-leasing limits parking spaces. Accessibility concerns also pose significant challenges, as most housing units fail to meet the needs of disabled students and community members.

We urge county and UCSB representatives, along with community members, to address these social, environmental, and economic issues, and advocate for changes to the housing situation, ensuring the continuous growth and vibrancy of the Isla Vista community.

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# Executive Summary

The housing crisis in Isla Vista (IV) poses significant challenges, impacting UCSB students and local residents. This report examines the multifaceted social, environmental, and economic issues.

## Social Concerns:

Many housing units in IV do not comply with ADA standards, creating accessibility issues for disabled residents. Overcrowding exacerbates waste management problems, leading to health and environmental hazards.

## Economic Concerns:

High rental costs in IV place a substantial financial burden on students, many of whom must allocate a significant portion of their income to housing. International students face additional challenges due to restrictive visa regulations limiting employment opportunities. Despite high rents, IV experiences significant safety issues, highlighting inconsistencies between rental costs and crime rates.

## Environmental Concerns:

Cliff erosion along Del Playa Drive presents serious safety risks, with a history of accidents. Preventative measures are urgently needed to ensure resident safety. Overcrowding and excessive garbage further degrade the environment, impacting both human health and local ecosystems. Additionally, parking shortages contribute to environmental stress, with inadequate facilities and converted garages exacerbating the problem. Better management and enforcement of parking regulations are essential to mitigate these issues.

## Conclusion:

To address these issues, the report recommends implementing strategic measures such as rent control, increasing affordable housing, enhancing waste management services, and strengthening safety regulations. Promoting community engagement and advocating for UCSB's active involvement are crucial steps toward creating a more inclusive, sustainable, and secure living environment in Isla Vista. These efforts aim to improve the quality of life for all residents, ensuring long-term stability and community well-being.

# Introduction

## **Project Description:**

The housing crisis in Isla Vista (IV) poses significant challenges for both students and permanent residents. Many residents face issues related to accessibility, affordability, and sustainability. Our goal is to highlight these key concerns and propose viable solutions to create a more inclusive and equitable living environment. By examining social, environmental, and economic factors, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current status of housing within IV and recommend actionable steps to improve living conditions for all IV residents. We aim to involve collected data, community engagement, and policy recommendations to address the pressing needs of our community.

## **Scope:**

This study centers on the housing crisis within the confines of Isla Vista specifically, although we recognize the importance of expanding our recommendations to Goleta and Downtown Santa Barbara residents. We were interested in Isla Vista's unique demographic for our target population.

Isla Vista's composition of UCSB students alongside long-term residents provides us with further insight for our research. We analyze data and trends specific to this community to understand the multifaceted nature of our issue. Our research aims to propose solutions that benefit all residents, even those who are unaffected. The ultimate goal is to develop strategies that address immediate needs while promoting long-term sustainability and inclusivity.

## **Structure:**

Our project is structured around 3 key sections:

1. Social Concerns: How are current conditions affecting the quality of life for IV residents?
2. Environmental Concerns: What are the environmental impacts of existing housing policies, and how can it be improved?
3. Economic Concerns: What economic factors contribute to the housing crisis, and how can affordability and equity be enhanced?

# Social Concerns

The Isla Vista (I.V) housing crisis involves two specific critical issues that impact the community's well-being. This section examines key social concerns, including the challenges faced by residents due to inadequate accessibility and ineffective waste management. We will explore how the lack of accessible housing affects disabled and senior residents, the problems associated with excessive trash and improper disposal, and the broader implications these issues have on the community's quality of life. By addressing these factors, we aim to provide a thorough understanding of the social challenges that contribute to the overall housing crisis in I.V.

## Accessibility Issues Within IV:

Unknown to many residents, but well known among those who suffer the consequences of policies that do not comply with the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** are the disabled and senior members of our community. Quality of life is often diminished for these residents within our vibrant community. Issues ranging from structural barriers to non-compliant housing policies.

Regardless if you're able bodied or not, research has shown that universal design ensures that accessible spaces are usable by all people regardless of their abilities. These features include wide doorways, elevators/ramps, and more.

## Why ADA Compliance Matters in Santa Barbara?



**Figure 1 : Figure on why ADA Compliance matters**

### Structural Barriers:

The prevalence of structural barriers that impede mobility and independence for disabled individuals. Most housing units lack essential features such as ramps or elevators. Unlike the undergraduate dorms for first year students that contain elevators, not a single undergraduate apartment designated for third and fourth year students contains an elevator. This raises the question : If first year housing located on campus contains elevator access, why do **ALL** of the undergraduate apartments lack this simple accommodation that the university could afford to implement?

These issues also extend to most homes within Isla Vista. Most apartments have steep staircases with no alternative access points, posing a significant challenge for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility. Even when buildings are equipped with elevators, they are often unreliable or poorly maintained, further complicating the problem at hand.

The absence of these basic accommodations not only limits the housing options available to disabled residents, but also restricts their participation in community life.

## 6. Stairways and Elevators

- Handrails on both sides of stairways.
- Elevators or stairlifts for multi-story homes.

**Figure 2 : One of the ADA Requirements for Homes. Households must comply with ADA Standards.**

To address these issues, it is crucial that county governments implement mandatory building codes that mandate updates for ramps, elevators, and other accessibility features for all buildings, not just new construction.

### **Poor Accessible Features:**

Beyond structural barriers, many housing units in Isla Vista lack accessible features essential for daily living. Bathrooms and kitchens, in particular, are often designed without consideration of those with mobility needs. Most units do not have accessible bathrooms equipped with grab bars, roll-in-showers, or lower sinks. Similarly, kitchens rarely feature shorter counters or accessible storage cabinets, making it challenging for disabled residents to perform basic tasks.

These lack of features force individuals to rely on others for assistance, reducing their independence and quality of life. To improve, property owners and architects should be encouraged to incorporate **universal design** principles into their projects.

### **Non-Compliant Housing Policies:**

The alarmingly high rate at which housing units fail to comply with ADA requirements significantly limits the availability of housing for many, particularly as even able-bodied residents already struggle to find adequate housing. This non-compliance violates the right for equal access and opportunity, a fundamental standard for why the ADA was mandated in the first place. To address this, it is essential to enforce ADA through regular inspections and penalties for non-compliance. Additionally, establishing a local housing authority dedicated to monitoring and advocating for accessibility can help ensure that the needs of disabled residents are heard within the scope of housing practices.

### **Impacts of Excessive Garbage on Isla Vista Residents:**

Overcrowding and over-leasing of units in Isla Vista, driven by economic burdens, have led to excessive waste disposal. High amounts of trash unsuitable for proper disposal are unsanitary

and harmful to residents and the overall environment. The quality of life for Isla Vista residents is significantly diminished due to the overcrowding of units.

**Figure 3: Excessive Trash on Del Playa Drive in Isla Vista, California.**

Multiple studies have communicated the effects of excess garbage on the community. Local reports have highlighted this issue in hopes of establishing a firm solution. Emily Lui from UCSB's The Daily 2020, Santa Barbara numbers of illegal Because restaurants dining halls have takeout containers, use plastics is stores or restaurants be a shortage of cans, which may be streets" (Lui, 2023). It is encouraged that Isla Vista residents use reusable goods consistently rather than disposable goods, in addition to dining halls and local restaurants.



Nexus states, "Since July has been watching the dumping and littering rise. and UC Santa Barbara shifted to rely on plastic the consumption of single-growing. But in areas where have closed, there seems to public trash and recycling contributing to the littered

Yaati Sureka, in another article from The Daily Nexus, reports that in 2024, the Isla Vista Recreation & Park District and the Isla Vista Community Services District's annual post-Deltopia cleanup yielded 828 pounds of litter — equivalent to the weight of an American moose (Sureka, 2024). The excessive amounts of garbage in Isla Vista are uncalled for, and measures must be taken to mitigate this issue.

## **Impacts of Excessive Garbage on the Environment and How This Circles Back to Residents:**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) details the harmful nature of excessive garbage and improper disposal on various sectors of life, including biological, chemical, ecological, and human impacts. With the community being so close to the ocean, litter

can make its way into the water and travel greater distances, impacting all in harm's way. Garbage can also sink into the ocean floor and become ingested by marine animals, whose digested plastic particles and contaminants will enter the human body if consumed (EPA, 2021). Carcinogens, PCPs, pesticides, and more are byproducts of improper garbage disposal, eventually affecting human health.



**Figure 4: Plastic Waste on the Body of a Deceased Bird, Crucial to the Oceanic Environment and Ecosystem**

This problem is not only harmful to the environment but also unclean, putting community residents at risk for illness. Spoiled food and unsanitary disposed products, as demonstrated in Figure 4, also threaten the health of community members. Overcrowded units exacerbate these issues, harming the environment and dulling the quality of life for Isla Vista community members.



**Figure 5: Trash Buildup on Del Playa Drive, Falling Down Walkway to Ocean**

### **Preventive Measures, Short Term and Long Term Solutions:**

In light of these concerns, it is urgent that property management companies reconsider leasing practices and collaborate with local stakeholders to implement sustainable solutions. The EPA provides guidelines on improving waste management, reducing consumer waste, disposing or recycling waste properly, volunteering in community cleanups, and spreading awareness about the issue. By prioritizing responsible housing management and environmental stewardship, we can mitigate the adverse effects of over-leasing and ensure better health and quality of life for not just Isla Vista residents but the environment as a whole.



**Figure 6: Trash on Local Santa Barbara Beach**

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## **Economic Concerns**

The Isla Vista housing crisis presents a multifaceted challenge, with economic concerns playing a significant role. This section delves into the various financial burdens faced by residents, particularly UCSB students, due to high rental costs. We will explore several key aspects, including the exceptionally high rental costs in Isla Vista, the resulting financial burden on students, the unique challenges faced by international students, and the relationship between rental costs and crime rates. By examining these factors, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic difficulties that exacerbate the housing crisis in Isla Vista.

## Rental Cost in IV:

Rental costs in Isla Vista are exceptionally high, which is particularly challenging for a community predominantly composed of students, making it an unfriendly environment for those with limited financial resources. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment with approximately 500 square feet in Isla Vista is \$1,552 per month, and it is for a two-bedroom apartment is \$3,022 per month, which is 68.7% more than the national average of \$1,791 as we can read from the table below.

### Current National Averages

Apartment Type	Average Rent	Average Sq Ft
Studio	\$1,544/month	469 Sq Ft
One Bedroom	\$1,536/month	699 Sq Ft
Two Bedroom	\$1,791/month	999 Sq Ft
Three Bedroom	\$2,197/month	1,288 Sq Ft

**Figure 7: Current National Average rent of United States**

These high rental costs and utility and laundry expenses, which average \$125 per month, bring the total monthly cost of living in Isla Vista with an individual bedroom to around \$1,700, excluding food and other essentials.

## Financial Burden on Students:

The high cost of housing in Isla Vista creates a substantial financial burden for students. Many students rely on part-time employment to cover their living expenses. The average part-time wage in Isla Vista is approximately \$3,032 per month. Even for some students who decided to work in Goleta, it's around \$3,640.

According to the 30% rule, individuals should spend no more than 30% of their monthly income on rent to avoid being "cost-burdened." As the average rent we found in the previous part, students often spend significantly more than 50% of their income on rent. As a result, they are left with limited funds for other necessary expenses such as food, transportation, and educational materials.

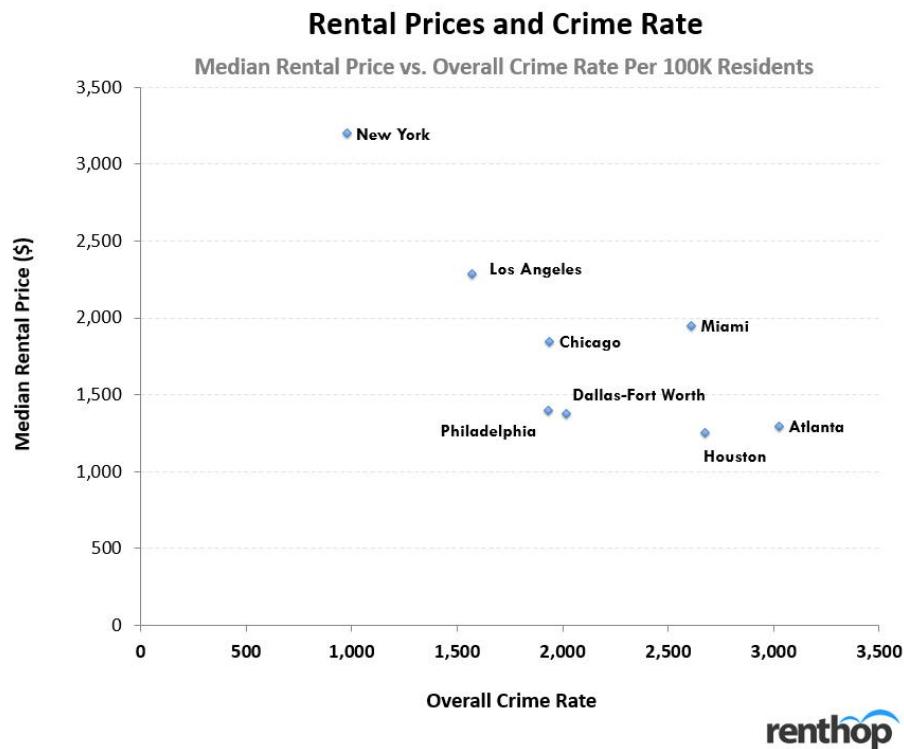
## Difficulties for International Students:

International students also face significant challenges, particularly due to stringent visa restrictions that limit their employment opportunities. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), F-1 students cannot work off-campus during their first academic year.

After that, they can only engage in specific types of employment, such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT), which must be related to their field of study and pre-approved by their Designated School Official and USCIS. These restrictions limit their opportunities to alleviate financial burdens through part-time work, exacerbating their economic difficulties in high-cost living areas like Goleta and Isla Vista.

## Rental Cost vs. Crime Rate:

One of the critical economic concerns in the Isla Vista housing crisis is the relationship between crime rates and rental costs. RentHop's research indicates that higher rental costs usually correlate with lower crime rates, as more expensive areas can afford better security and attract residents with higher socio-economic status. Additionally, according to data from Philomath News, small towns are generally safer than big cities because of their lower population density



and stronger community ties.

**Figure 8: Rental Prices and Crime Rate**

However, this expected pattern does not hold true when comparing the neighboring communities of Goleta and Irvine. Despite Goleta containing a smaller population and land size, in addition to having similar rental costs to Irvine, Goleta holds a significantly higher violent crime rate (13.4) compared to Irvine's 8.9. Based on the studies mentioned, we would expect Goleta to have a lower or at least equal crime rate to Irvine, but this is not the case. This anomaly highlights that

high rental costs do not always ensure lower crime rates and suggests that other factors are at play.

**Figure 9: Rent averages of Goleta and Irvine**

The data from BestPlaces.net showcases how Goleta has a violent crime rate of 13.4 and a



property crime rate of 23.8, while Isla Vista has slightly higher rates of 14.5 for violent crime and 27.5 for property crime. Both communities fall below the national averages of 22.7 for violent crime and 35.4 for property crime, yet their rates are still concerning given the high rental costs residents pay.

**Figure 10: Crime Rates in Goleta and Isla Vista**

This comparison is particularly relevant because Isla Vista and Goleta are neighboring communities with similar crime issues and high rental costs. By examining the disparity between Goleta and Irvine, we can better understand why Isla Vista, despite its high rental costs, also faces significant crime problems. Isla Vista, being a neighboring community to Goleta, even has a higher crime rate than Goleta, making the analysis of Goleta versus Irvine applicable to Isla Vista as well. This situation is especially problematic for UCSB students and residents in Isla Vista, who are burdened with high rental costs without enjoying the corresponding safety benefits. The added financial and emotional stress of living in an area with significant safety concerns can negatively impact student well-being and overall quality of life. Additionally, residents may incur further expenses for personal security measures and higher insurance premiums.

## Solutions:

To mitigate the housing crisis in Isla Vista, efforts should focus on lowering rental rates and renovating existing housing to improve living conditions. Additionally, providing student subsidies can help alleviate financial burdens. UCSB has planned a \$3.7 million investment in

Isla Vista, including \$1.2 million for proactive apartment inspections to address health and safety issues, \$500,000 for a new public restroom, \$428,000 for park infrastructure improvements, and \$1.38 million for matching grants for infrastructure enhancements such as sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, and street lighting. These initiatives aim to enhance the overall living environment and indirectly help manage housing costs.

For safety improvements, Isla Vista can learn from Irvine's successful community policing strategies. Establishing neighborhood watch programs and fostering positive interactions between law enforcement and residents can significantly enhance community safety. Investing in safety enhancements such as better street lighting, strategically placed surveillance cameras, and easily accessible emergency call stations can deter criminal activities and ensure a safer living environment for students and residents. By implementing these measures, Isla Vista can create a safer and more secure community, reducing stress and improving the overall quality of life for its residents.

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## Environmental Concerns

The Isla Vista housing crisis involves critical environmental and logistical challenges. This section addresses long-term issues like bluff erosion affecting homes on Del Playa's oceanside and ongoing parking problems for residents. By examining these environmental and logistical concerns, we aim to shed light on the critical issues that exacerbate the housing crisis in Isla Vista.

### **Cliff Erosion:**

Many UCSB students live in Isla Vista, particularly along the beach on Ocean Side Del Playa. The cliffs and balconies of houses on Del Playa overlook the ocean with a range of thirty to seventy feet separation between them. The violent waves are often crashing into the bluffs, resulting in erosion.

It is estimated that the average cliff erosion rate is six inches per year, totaling 10 feet over the last 20 years (Cliff erosion in Isla Vista). Most landlords are doing nothing to protect their tenants from the eroding cliffs. Since 1994, 14 individuals have lost their lives after falling off cliffs in Isla Vista.

## Student Safety:

Students should have access to safe and secure housing, and property managers should provide it. Most property managers do not take preventative measures to protect tenants from cliff erosion. Isla Vista district managers are attempting to require all property managers to install high six-foot fences to prevent students from accidentally falling off cliffs. Additionally, floodlights along the cliff and bathrooms are being installed to prevent people from going near the cliff while intoxicated.

During a storm in February this year, a house deck collapsed, leading to the evacuation of three neighboring houses. None of the four houses, housing over 45 students, were provided a warning by their property managers. This dangerous situation highlights the need for better safety measures.



**Figure 11: 6745 Balcony falling off due to erosion**

## Preventative measures:

With the increasing effects of climate change and accelerating coastal erosion, community members are working on ways to reduce erosion and protect houses. Some houses have been shifted backward to get further away from the eroding cliff. However, erosion is inevitable, and all houses on Del Playa will eventually need to retreat from the cliffs. County officials have noted that a managed retreat is the only realistic long-term solution.

In the past, county officials approved the construction of a timber seawall along portions of the beach to protect the bluffs, with plans to add an additional 2,200 feet of seawall. However, the Coastal Commission has now banned further creation of timber seawalls due to non-compliance with regulations. Although the seawall protects the bluffs directly behind them, it causes beach

erosion downshore and along the coast (Lovely).



**Figure 12: Seawall protecting the left side of the bluffs while the right side shows major signs of erosion.**

Property owners are now adding higher fencing and bluff reinforcements to minimize coastal erosion. Some argue that these measures compromise the coastal lifestyle and are too costly. These temporary measures highlight that the only realistic long-term solution is to back away from the eroding cliffs.

It is crucial for all students to have access to safe and secure housing. Buildings should not have balconies that can fall apart without warning. The effects of climate change will accelerate coastal erosion and increase the probability of collapse, making it essential to take all safety precautions beforehand.

## **Parking:**

Finding parking in Isla Vista is a significant issue for car owners. Most houses offer housing spaces for four to six residents but only provide one parking spot, leaving others to fend for themselves. Street parking is a struggle due to the vast number of students with cars.

Parking spots are often stacked, with many people blocking a car, making it difficult to get around. Relying on others to move their car can be time-consuming and cause delays.

Additionally, some people live out of their cars or vans due to limited housing, occupying parking spaces for months on end. This prevents nearby residents from parking on the streets outside their houses.

Isla Vista plans to implement a new parking law prohibiting cars from parking within 20 feet of a marked crosswalk. This will ensure drivers and pedestrians can see each other before crossing an intersection, improving safety. However, this law will remove about 150 parking spaces, making it harder for students to park near their houses



**Figure 13: Street with no parking spots**

To improve parking availability, Isla Vista should enforce parking times, allowing cars to park in the same location only for a certain period before moving. Larger vehicles should also be limited due to small available spaces.

Property managers should be held liable for not providing adequate parking spaces. Many convert garages into extra units to get more rent money, skimping on parking spaces. The city should enforce housing codes to ensure all houses have the legal amount of parking spaces per unit.

Lastly, there should also be more parking availability for Isla Vista residents, whether on their property or through public parking. Buildings should comply with local codes and provide the required amount of parking spots for their tenants.

## **Long - Term Recommendations**

### **I. Establish Rent Control Measures**

- A. Advocate for local government to implement rent control policies to cap rent increases and make housing more affordable for students and low-income residents
- B. Encourage UCSB Administration to negotiate with landlords for rent reduction

- II. Increase Affordable Housing**
  - A. Push for the development of more affordable housing units specifically designed for students and low-income families
  - B. Encourage public-private partnerships to fund and build housing
- III. Improve Utility Services**
  - A. Lobby for enhanced water management services to address excessive garbage issue, including more frequent pickups and larger capacity begins
- IV. Enhance Safety Regulations**
  - A. Promote county representatives to enact regular inspections of cliffside properties and implement measures to prevent further erosion and accidents
  - B. Foster a safer culture among law enforcement by emphasizing college-educated recruits, continuous training, and engagement with community
- V. Support for Disabled Students & International Students**
  - A. Ensure that new and existing housing units are accessible to students with disabilities by enforcing ADA compliance
  - B. Relax Visa restrictions for International Students to allow them to engage in off-campus employment during their first academic year
- VI. Improve Parking Solutions**
  - A. Push for the development of additional parking facilities to accommodate the growing number of vehicles in Isla Vista
  - B. Enforce regulations that require an appropriate number of parking spots per unit or resident
  - C. Implement and strictly enforce designated parking times to ensure efficient use of available parking spaces
- VII. Increase Community Engagement**
  - A. Organize community meetings and forums to discuss housing issues and gather input from residents on potential solutions
  - B. Create awareness campaigns through social media, local newspapers, and campus channels to highlight the housing crisis and its impact on residents
- VIII. Advocate for UCSB Involvement**
  - A. Petition UCSB to take a more active role in addressing the housing crisis by providing more on-campus housing options and financial assistance
  - B. Elect a student representative board that holds UCSB accountable for housing solutions
- IX. Collaborate with Local Government**
  - A. Form a coalition of students, residents, and community leaders to lobby county representatives for policy changes and funding and engage in continuous dialogue.

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